

An Introduction to MLA Documentation

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Introduction

As scholars, it is essential that you give credit to the sources from which you have borrowed ideas as you write your own papers. Specific academic disciplines use different systems that allow you to do this, but perhaps the most widely used and easiest is MLA (Modern Language Association). At its heart, MLA documentation is a two-part system, and if you keep that in mind, you will realize that it is far less complicated than it might initially appear.

But first, what needs to be cited?

- Direct quotes
- Statistics
- Original ideas

Note: Even if you don't directly quote (use the original source's exact words) and instead summarize (condense) or paraphrase (restate the ideas in your own words), you still need to cite the source of the information you use.

And what doesn't?

- Common knowledge
- Your own analysis

The MLA System

Part 1: Parenthetical Citation

The first element of the MLA system of documentation is *in-text parenthetical citation*. As you are writing your paper, you will borrow ideas from other sources—journalists, other scholars, reference books, web pages, etc.—and you need to acknowledge the source of that information, but how? It's easy. Immediately following your use of the information, indicate its source by putting the author's last name and the page number in parentheses. If an entire paragraph makes use of information from the source, just use one citation at the end of the paragraph.

(Burroway 62)

Of course, a lot of information comes from the web, which rarely has an author or page number. What then? If there is no author, just use a short version of the title; if there's no page number (and note that while most programs print a page number on hard copies, it isn't part of the original document and therefore isn't used in the citation), omit it.

("Analysis" 33)

("Bombing")

Part 2: Works Cited page

Fine, you have names and numbers in parentheses—but what's it all mean? That's where the second part comes in—the *Works Cited page*. Every name you use in the text must have an entry on the Works Cited page, and the opposite is also true—every entry on the Works Cited page must have a parenthetical citation in the text.

Features of a Works Cited page:

- Each source is listed only once.

- Sources are listed alphabetically by author (or title—ignoring 'a,' 'an,' and 'the'—if there's no author).

Works Cited

El Lozy, Mahmoud. "Cairo Diary: Defying the Theater Censor on a Campus in Egypt."

Chronical of Higher Education 16 Jan. 1998: B8. Academic Universe. Lexis-Nexis.

American U. in Cairo Lib. 30 Nov. 2001 <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>>.

Friedman, Thomas L. "Glasnost in the Gulf." New York Times on the Web 27 Feb. 2001.

18 Nov. 2001 <www.nytimes.com/2001/01/27/opinion/27FRIE.html>.

Hamad, Abdel-Azim. "Another Gordian Knot." Al-Ahram Weekly 29 Nov.-5 Dec. 2001: 1.

"The International Angle." Cairo Times 22-28 Nov. 2001: 9.

Lozada, Carlos. "Can You Spare a Quarter?" Christian Science Monitor 7 Aug. 1998: 15.

Academic Search Elite. EBSCO. American U. in Cairo Lib. 27 Nov. 2001

<<http://epnet.com>>.

"A Matter of Fiqh: A Fatwa for Muslim Americans in the US Military Creates a Fury."

Cairo Times 15-21 Nov. 2001: 11.

Rodenbeck, Max. Cairo: The City Victorious. New York: Vintage, 1999.

The first line of each entry is at the left margin, but each additional line is indented (this is called a hanging indent).

Every entry ends in a period.

The web page address (URL) is enclosed in angle brackets: <www.aucegypt.edu>.

What's an entry look like? The format varies depending on the type of source, but everything comes from a basic root—the book with a single author.

Standard format:

Last Name, First. Title. City: Publisher, year.

Burroway, Janet. Writing Fiction. New York: Longman, 2000.

Variants:

Magazine/Newspaper

Last Name, First. "Article Title." Magazine Title Date: Pages.

Walker, Martin. "The New Power Politics of Trade." Middle East Times 24-30 Nov. 2001:4.

Magazine/Newspaper on the World Wide Web

Last Name, First. "Article Title." Magazine Title Publication Date. Access Date <URL>.

"Bombing in Haifa Follows Attack in Downtown Jerusalem." New York Times on the Web 2 Dec. 2001. 3 Dec. 2001 <www.nytimes.com>.

Article from a Subscription Database (for example, EBSCOhost or Lexis-Nexis)

Last Name, First. "Article Title." Magazine Title Publication Date: Pages. Database.

Company. Library. Access Date <URL>.

Solovoy, Alden. "Beggars & Holy Men." Hospitals & Health Networks 5 Oct. 1998: 8.

Academic Search Elite. EBSCO. American U. in Cairo Lib. 09 Sept. 2003
<http://epnet.com>.